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SUBJECT: NINEWA AND ERBIL GOVERNORS MEET IN MOSUL

REF: BAGHDAD 1448

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Robert S. Ford for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During his May 31 visit to Mosul (reftel), the Ambassador called on local Arab and Kurdish political leaders to address their differences through dialogue. The Embassy, Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Nineva, Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) Erbil, and Multinational Division - North (MND-N) have worked together to actively encourage such dialogue in northern Iraq. In view of the impasse in Mosul between the mostly Arab Al-Hadba Party and the mostly Kurdish Nineva Fraternal List (NFL), we facilitated an alternative channel of Arab-Kurd political dialogue between the governors of Nineva and Erbil that resulted in a remarkable meeting in Mosul between Gov. Atheel Alnujaifi (Nineva) and Gov. Nawzad Hadi (Erbil) on June 6. While conflict-seekers - both Arab and Kurd - remain active, the establishment of political talks between leaders of neighboring provinces with a history of commercial and cultural ties contributes to our broader strategy of reducing Arab-Kurd tensions in Iraq. End Summary.

¶2. (C) During recent conversations with senior officials in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Nineva, MND-N BG Brown planted the idea of a governor-to-governor meeting to discuss bilateral issues between Erbil and Mosul. Both sides agreed, and on June 6 Nineva Governor Alnujaifi met Erbil Governor Hadi at Mosul airport. Neither side insisted on pre-conditions for the meeting, or a specific agenda. MND-N facilitated the transportation of Governor Hadi to Nineva, and the Peshmerga Liaison officer at the Nineva Operations Command (NOC) secured KRG President Masoud Barzani's approval of Hadi's participation in a meeting with Alnujaifi. The Nineva Vice Governor of the Al-Hadba party accompanied Alnujaifi, but all military aides left the room (and continued security-related discussions in the adjoining room).

¶3. (C) The Embassy's Senior Advisor for Northern Iraq Affairs Vrooman joined the governors' discussion toward the end, at their request, for a wrap-up on the results of their bilateral meeting. In the words of Vice Governor Feisal, the meeting broke the ice between these political leaders, helped to remove fears held by both sides, and established a good personal relationship between the governors. Governor Alnujaifi echoed this sentiment, stressing that it would be important for both leaders to use this channel as a means of building better understanding between Arabs and Kurds. It would take a lot of effort, but, given time, Alnujaifi said he was hopeful that his professed goal of coexistence could be realized. All issues were now on the table, and the two parties were now better aware of each other's positions on a wide range of economic, trade, cultural and political issues.

¶4. (C) The governors agreed to hold future meetings, as their discussions had not resulted in immediate solutions and would require more time. Alnujaifi expressed his hope that

Hadi would come back to spend time in Mosul as Alnujaifi's guest, and Hadi offered Erbil as a venue for a future meeting. Vrooman asked what their public line would be on the meeting, and the governors said they had agreed that they would state that all issues were on the table, and that dialogue had been fruitful and would continue. More importantly, both governors agreed that there was a need for calm and a halt in negative rhetoric from Arab and Kurdish leaders, as this would only make conditions for resolving Disputed Internal Boundaries (DIBS) issues more difficult. (Note: The commitments of these provincial leaders did not prevent a Deputy Speaker of the COR, KDP member Aref Tayfor, from reportedly demanding the division of Nineva Province in two - one part for the Kurds, one for the Arabs. This outburst incensed many Arab parliamentarians, who have called for Tayfor's resignation.)

Northern Iraqis Discuss Neighbors

¶5. (C) Much of the discussion in which emboff participated concerned the role of Iraq's neighbors rather than provincial politics. Alnujaifi and Hadi shared their analysis of political developments within Turkey, and the significance of the changes brought by the AKP. They further agreed in principle that Islam and politics should be kept separate, and assessed that even though Erdogan was an Islamist, his policies reflected that separation of religion and politics. What was notable about Turkey's evolution was that Erdogan appeared much more in touch with his people than previous leaders had been, they asserted. Both governors attributed

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this to Erdogan's Islamist (Muslim Brotherhood) worldview of influencing society from the bottom up. Alnujaifi acknowledged to Hadi the challenges he faced in dealing with Islamists (and their more extremist brethren) in Nineva, and asked whether Islamists in Kurdistan would make further inroads in the upcoming KRG elections.

Hadi on KRG Internal Politics

¶6. (C) Hadi assessed that Nawshirwan Mustafa's candidacy and his "Change" list would eat into the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) constituency in Sulaimaniya, and that even with its alliances with other small, non-Islamist parties, the KIU would not bring in more than ten percent of the seats in the KRG parliament. Hadi thought the KDP-PUK alliance would win 65-70 seats, and that Nawshirwan's Change list could garner as many as twenty. Interestingly, both governors thought this result would be good for the KRG - i.e. it would create the possibility of a loyal (non-Islamist) opposition. Alnujaifi noted that the KDP-PUK had had a lock on KRG politics for a long time, and a (non-threatening) opposition would be healthful. Hadi did not think that Nawshirwan's candidacy would threaten Talabani, as the two men had different objectives. Talabani wished to remain a regional and national leader, whose interests included relations between Iraq and its neighbors as well as relations between the KRG and Baghdad. Hadi said Nawshirwan's heart lies in Sulaimaniya, and that he hoped to cement his political power in that province during the provincial elections that follow KRG elections.

POSTSCRIPT ON MOSUL RECEPTION
AND THE PRESIDENT'S CAIRO SPEECH

¶7. (C) Vrooman noted that the new Ambassador's first two visits outside of Baghdad had been to Erbil and Mosul, and asked Alnujaifi for his assessment of the impact of the May

31 reception hosted by the Ambassador at the Mosul Museum. Alnujaifi said he had sounded out several circles of Moslawis, and all of them had underscored what a milestone it had been to hear the Governor and the Ambassador express pride and respect for Iraq's culture and history. This, Alnujaifi hoped, would help the province and the country turn a new page. In a similar vein, both governors applauded President Obama's Cairo speech for its tone and his outreach to Muslims, and believed that this had come at a particularly timely moment in U.S.-Iraqi relations.

HILL